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## JESUS AS HEALER.

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THAT Jesus considered the healing of disease an important, or even an essential, feature of his work is apparent both from his practice and from his words. His practice again and again elicits from the evangelists the remark that they are unable to record every individual cure. They content themselves with such summaries as we find in Luke 4 : 40 : " All they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him ; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them." The prominence which these physical cures had in his ministry is convincingly reflected in his fear lest the Messianic function should come to be associated, or even identified, with this form of ministry. And yet he found himself constrained more than once to draw attention to his works of healing and to their significance. When Herod's threat was reported to him, he almost gave the impression that his whole work was to heal : " I will perform cures today and tomorrow : and the third day I will be perfected." Still more significant is his explanation of his reason, or one of his reasons, for exorcism, which may be reckoned among his works of healing. His justification is that the strong man armed who guards his own house, that is, Satan, must be bound, if the contents of his house are to be spoiled. The casting out of devils was the binding of the strong man, the necessary preliminary to the taking possession of the spirit of man and the abolition of all Satanic results therein. It was the sign that the kingdom of God had really begun among men (Luke 11 : 20).

Why, then, did our Lord perform miracles of healing ? Not to convince people that he was the Messiah, but because he possessed that divine love and power which made him the Messiah. He wrought no miracle for the purpose of convincing men of his Messiahship. From the first, indeed, this constituted one of

his typical, normal temptations. The people expected that by some stupendous sign, such as leaping from the temple roof and alighting unhurt in the court below, the Messiah would declare himself. But any such sign, wholly disconnected from the spiritual character of his work, he resolutely, peremptorily, and persistently refused. Nor were any of the wonderful works he did done for the purpose of persuading men. Their primary purpose was to relieve distress. He came to proclaim and establish God's kingdom among men, to manifest God's presence and love. This he did more effectually by his works of healing than by his teaching. It was his miracles that impressed men with a sense of the divine compassion; they were the revelation of the Father's sympathy. Disease, Christ felt, is incongruous with the kingdom of God; and if he is to exhibit that kingdom, it must be manifested in the physical as in the spiritual sphere. He was grieved when confronted with disease and death. This, he felt, is not the world as the Father would have it and means it to be. In so far as he had power to remove the distresses of men he felt called upon to do it. These healings were the works given him by the Father to do. They manifested God's love because done out of pure compassion in the Father's name. This compassion was so true that it could be said of Christ, as God's representative, "He bare our sicknesses;" into such thorough sympathy with the sick did he enter. As it was by the power of God he achieved these cures, so it was the love of God that prompted them; and therefore he could say: "If I by the finger of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come unto you!" They were the works congruous to God's presence, and accomplishing results which exhibited the kingdom.

But just because the primary purpose of the miracles was to give expression to God's mercy and not to prove his Messiahship, on this very account they can be appealed to as evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. The poet writes because he is a poet, and not for the purpose of convincing the world that he is a poet. And yet his writing does convince the world that he is a poet. The benevolent man acts precisely as Christ did when he laid his finger on the lips of the healed person and charged

him to make no mention of his kindness; and therefore all who do come to the knowledge of it recognize him as a charitable person. Actions done for the purpose of establishing a character for courage or compassion are much more likely to establish a character for vanity and love of display. And it is just because the primary intention of Christ's miracles was, not to establish a character for this or that, but directly to help needy persons and so give utterance to God's love, that they do convincingly prove him to be the true king of the new kingdom. Accordingly Jesus does not scruple on occasion to appeal to his miracles: "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me;" "Though ye believe not me, believe the works!"

Matthew has recorded (16:1-4) a significant conversation between our Lord and the combined Sadducees and Pharisees on this point. They came to him with their usual demand for a convincing sign from heaven, continuing thus the initial temptation to end all dubiety about his Messianic dignity by some astounding feat or outward display. To this appeal he replies: "In the evening ye say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red: and in the morning, There will be a storm today, for it is lowering red. Ye know how to read the face of the sky, and can ye not read the signs of the times?" You know the sequences of nature and understand that certain results uniformly follow certain appearances. But you have no eye for spiritual sequences. You do not recognize that a clever feat or a supernatural marvel which makes men stare has no natural relation to the blessings of the Messianic kingdom. Neither do you perceive that the presence among you of one in perfect harmony with God and devoted to human interests must result in a kind of weather altogether new in the spiritual world. You do not see that the entrance into the world of perfect humanity, of God in human form applying himself with all his divine love and power to the actual needs of men, portends more good to the race than the greatest physical marvel could suggest. Suppose I did clothe the sun with a cloud as you gaze upon it in the bare heavens; suppose I commanded these mountains to be removed,

or leaped unhurt from the temple roof to the courts below—there is no necessary and infallible connection between such marvels and the establishment of God's kingdom among men or their deliverance from sin. You could not from your observation of such phenomena predict what would result; but if you could read the signs of the times, you might infallibly argue that one in perfect accord with God could not enter into this world's life and become a part of its history without setting in motion a train of never-ending and infinitely beneficent consequences.

The *power by which* he wrought miracles he also refers to the spirit of God. He prayed before he raised Lazarus. He declared that certain healings could only be accomplished by prayer (Mark 9:29). Matthew applies to him the words of Isaiah: "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." And by this it seems to be intimated that profound sympathy was a prerequisite of miracle. It was not with a mere wave of the hand or a casual word he healed, but only by putting himself in the place of the sufferer on the one hand, and by being in perfect harmony with God on the other hand.

But while our Lord so directly connected his miracles of healing with the kingdom he came to found, and while they did attract attention to himself and help men to recognize the compassion and purposes of God as manifested in him, he yet did not consider them to be peculiar to himself. When the disciples asked him why they could not heal the lunatic boy, his answer was: "Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you." In sending them out to preach the kingdom, he gave them also power to exhibit it in the healing of the sick. He assured them, in his last conversation with them previous to his death, that they would do "greater works" than those which he had done. And not only do we read of healing power being possessed by the apostles, but Paul speaks of "gifts of healings" as one of the recognized forms of the Spirit's manifestation, and with no hint that such gifts would not be permanent. In the epistle of James we

find the explicit assurance that the prayer of faith shall save the sick.

That these forecasts were for a time fulfilled in the church is claimed by the writers of the first three centuries. Justin and Irenæus affirm that in their time some Christians had the gift of healing. Origen, apparently after cautious consideration, declares that "traces" of this gift were still discernible. Gradually such marvels were discredited and discouraged, probably because of the false importance that was attached to them. As martyrdom had its day and then fell rather into disrepute, so was it with these gifts. "When the world that ought to be repenting is taken up with staring, the sobriety of faith is lost in the gospel of credulity." And so in Chrysostom's time he is able to say that miracles do not now happen (*σημεῖα νῦν οὐ γίνεται*). But this break in the continuity of miracles is only temporary and belongs to periods of dulled faith, as Bengel and Christlieb agree in declaring. Bushnell, too, certainly not a credulous person, devotes a chapter of his *Nature and the Supernatural* to the proof of the proposition that "miracles and spiritual gifts are not discontinued;" and he points out, as others also have done, that the dreams of Hus, the prophesyings of Luther and Fox and Archbishop Usher, the ecstasies of Xavier, the miracles related in the *Scots Worthies*, "with innumerable other wonders, and visitations of God, in the saints of the church, during all the intervening ages, bridge the gulf between us and the ancient times, and bring us to a question of miracles and gifts, as a question of our own day and time." And he concludes his remarkable discussion of the subject with words which will be indorsed by everyone who has been at the trouble to examine the evidence: "As regards the general truth that supernatural facts, such as healings, tongues, and other gifts, may as well be manifested now as at any former time, and that there has never been a formal discontinuance, I am perfectly satisfied. I know no proof to the contrary that appears to me to have a straw's weight."

The facts on which belief in the continuance of such gifts of healing is based are too well known to require restatement. It

must suffice to refer to one or two of the best-authenticated instances. Luther's effectual fervent prayer for Melancthon when in a moribund state resulted in the perfect recovery of his friend; and this is certified by both reformers. Richard Baxter and Dr. A. J. Gordon, of Boston, both became believers in the continuance of faith-healing by experiences of their own. The remarkable cures effected by Dorothea Trüdel were certified by well-known physicians, as also are some of those witnessed at Lourdes. Erskine, of Linlathen, made careful inquiries into the story of the Macdonald family at Port Glasgow and put on record his conviction of the genuineness of the miraculous cure. The cures wrought by Greatrakes and George Fox seem equally well attested. And, in fact, it is one of the most patent phenomena in the history of Christianity that in times of persecution or revival, when the religious emotions are stimulated and deepened, such manifestations occur.

It is in our day less necessary to insist upon the reality of such manifestations, because science has taken up a line of inquiry which puts them beyond doubt and at the same time explains their nature. In Tuke's *Illustrations of the Influence of the Mind upon the Body in Health and Disease*, or in Carpenter's *Mental Physiology*, or in Alice Fielding's *Faith-Healing and Christian Science*, sufficient evidence is adduced to show that one of the most potent agents in dispelling certain forms of disease is confident expectation of cure. Thus Dr. Carpenter in his authoritative work states: "That the *confident expectation of a cure* is the most potent means of bringing it about, doing that which no medical treatment can accomplish, may be affirmed as the generalized result of experiences of the most varied kind, extending through a long series of ages. . . . For although there can be no doubt that in a great number of cases the patients have *believed themselves* to be cured, when no *real amelioration* of their condition had taken place, yet there is a large body of trustworthy evidence that permanent amendment of a kind perfectly obvious to others has shown itself in a great variety of local maladies, when the patients have been sufficiently possessed by the *expectation* of benefit and by *faith* in the efficacy of the means employed."

On these authoritatively certified cures it is necessary to make two observations: (1) It is only a certain class of diseases which yield to the influence of a confident expectation of cure — diseases which result, directly or indirectly, from a disordered nervous system: hypochondria, hysteria, some forms of blindness and of lameness, and so forth. Diseases which require for their cure a strong mental stimulant find what they need in a renewal of hope. (2) It is the expectation itself which brings the healing virtue, and it seems to matter little how this expectation is engendered, whether by belief in a popular superstition, or in some wholly inadequate means employed, or in the skill of some person, or in God. It seems that the royal touch was actually efficacious in some cases of epilepsy, goiter, and even scrofula — at least physicians certified its efficacy — yet such cures can only have been the result of a freshly aroused expectation of health. It was belief in a superstition, yet the belief was physically efficacious. So in the cures by colored water or by stroking, which are related in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, the expectation of relief was really groundless, yet it was efficacious. It is the faith itself which cures.

This conclusion, which seems inevitable, raises questions regarding our Lord's miracles. Were the cures he wrought dependent directly on the presence and power of God, or were they the result of an aroused expectation? Did the faith which he sought to quicken in those whom he healed pass directly to the Almighty and rest on him, or was it a mere faith that somehow a cure was to be wrought? One cannot read the gospels without perceiving that in some instances the faith that cured could not be called spiritual. The woman who was healed of the issue of blood approached our Lord very much as an ignorant peasant has recourse to a holy well or some kind of charm; and our Lord's dread lest by the multiplication of cures his spiritual work should be dimmed and put in a subordinate place would have been unnecessary had the faith of the diseased who thronged to him been a faith in God. This absence of explicit faith in God on the part of the patient would seem at first sight to leave it open to anyone to say that the cures wrought by



Christ are merely instances of the now well-understood fact that expectation cures certain forms of disease.

But we must distinguish. For, in the first place, however meager or superstitious was the faith of the diseased person, the faith of Christ was always directly resting on God. And, moreover and accordingly, his power of working miracles was not restricted to the healing of disease, still less to certain forms of disease, but disclosed also the divine power over the forces of nature. Godet's words are worthy of consideration: "One consequence of the close connection of soul and body is that, when the spirit of man is inspired by the power of God, it can sometimes exert upon the body, and through it upon other bodies, an influence which is marvelous. This kind of miracle is, therefore, possible in every age of the church's history; it was possible in the Middle Ages, and is possible still. That which would seem to be no longer possible is the miraculous action of the divine power upon external nature. The age of such miracles seems to have closed with the work of revelation, of which they were but the auxiliaries." Perhaps it would be more strictly true to say that such miracles are still possible to a like faith, but that Jesus remains, and ever will remain, in faith as in all things else, preëminent, the leader in faith and its completer.

The deductions drawn from the above-mentioned facts by faith-healers and Christian scientists are partly true, partly false. The error into which eccentrics are liable in this matter to fall may perhaps best be guarded against by the following considerations:

1. The cures wrought by Christ were gratuitous. Whoever, therefore, makes gain of cures professedly wrought in his name dishonors Christ and brings scandal on the name of Christian. It is conceivable, and indeed it has actually happened, that a person's whole time should be taken up in attending to the sick, and in such cases a decent livelihood must be provided; but certainly suspicion will justly rest on persons who accumulate wealth through a professed connection with him who had not where to lay his head. The fate of Simon Magus and of the sons of Sceva can still be earned.

2. Both our Lord and Paul were careful to impress upon the church the unrivaled supremacy of holiness as the manifestation of the presence of God with man. The gifts of an extraordinary kind were at the best secondary and subordinate. And there could have been in primitive times, and there could be now, no more disastrous heresy than an admiration and pursuit of physical in preference to spiritual blessing. Paul's disparagement of even the most valuable *charismata* is only one more evidence of his sanity and sense, and of his clear perception of that which really constituted the life and well-being of the church. That disparagement is equally needful now. Those who most devotedly followed Christ while on earth were not those who received physical benefits from him. The apostles were strong and healthy men who needed no cure. The tendency to postpone what is spiritual to what is physical is sufficiently strong in all men to call for very careful watching.

3. To associate gifts of healing, as the Christian scientists do, with certain theories of disease partly unintelligible and partly nonsensical is to part company at once with Christianity and with science, and to bring prayer and faith into disrepute. The gift of tongues had its uses in apostolic times, yet Paul would rather speak five words with understanding than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue, and he perceived that the abuse of this gift might well bring on the church the contempt of the outsiders. "Will they not say that ye are mad?" Those who so abuse such gifts as they have, and bring a scandal on the church of a similar kind, may well consider whether it is not time to ask themselves whether they are using their gifts "to profit withal" rather than for the advantage of the whole body. The greatest exponent of faith the world has ever seen exclaims: "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing." The love that uses the gift of the spirit for the welfare of the body of Christ is ever incomparably greater than the gift itself.